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## CHAPTER 19 PROCESS REVIEWS

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## CHAPTER 19 PROCESS REVIEWS

### 19.1 INTRODUCTION

#### FHWA PROCESS REVIEWS

In the past, program review/product evaluations (process reviews) were generally initiated and scheduled annually by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for selected areas of the Federal-aid program. Under the stewardship agreement between FHWA and Caltrans, for non-NHS projects, the only activities which FHWA shall use the process reviews are those activities required outside of Title 23 such as, Title 49, the Davis-Bacon Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act. FHWA process review teams are accompanied by Caltrans local assistance staff who monitor projects individually for compliance with all laws, regulations, and procedures developed to administer Federal-aid projects. The process reviews are used to evaluate these aspects of the local agencies Federal-aid project development program. Caltrans is responsible for participating in the initial review and all follow-up work identified by the review team.

#### CALTRANS PROCESS REVIEW PROGRAM

As outlined in Chapter 1 and 2 of this manual, Caltrans has provided local agencies with broad delegation, latitude and responsibility for developing their Federal-aid projects. In order for Caltrans to fulfill their roles and responsibilities for the local assistance Federal-aid program, as outlined, Caltrans will use the process review as the main method for determining if local agencies are in compliance with all Federal-aid laws, regulations, and procedures. The process reviews will be used to evaluate all aspects (including Title 23 requirements) of the local agencies Federal-aid program and to improve local assistance procedures.

The goal of all individual process reviews is for Caltrans to demonstrate that requirements imposed by the Federal and State governments are being met and that proper procedures are performed by the administering agencies.

The purpose of Caltrans Process Review Program is to maintain a continual process to improve local assistance procedures for a more efficient and effective Federal-aid and State funded local assistance program.

### 19.2 METHODS

The procedures for Process Reviews apply to both National Highway System (NHS) and non-NHS Federal-aid projects.

#### PROCESS REVIEW COMMITTEE

A Process Review Committee has been established to guide and approve the yearly process review monitoring plan. The committee shall:

- Review for consistency and approve recommendations from the process review reports developed by the review teams.
- Resolve any problems which occur with the process review procedures.

The Process Review Committee shall consist of headquarters, Office of Local Programs staff:

- Assistant Program Manager - Design and Local Programs (Committee Chairman)
- Chief, Procedures Development Branch
- Chief, Program Management Branch
- Chief, Project Implementation Branch
- Process Review Engineer

Others could be invited to the meetings depending on the items to be covered. This could include but not be limited to:

- Structures local assistance representative
- Right of way local assistance representative
- District Local Assistance Engineer (DLAE) representative(s)
- FHWA representative(s)
- Local agency city/county representative(s)
- Metropolitan Planning Organization/Regional Transportation Planning Agency representative(s)

A yearly monitoring plan shall be developed by the Process Review Engineer (PRE) with adjustments made to it each July by the Process Review Committee. The plan shall outline the topics, schedule, method and goals desired for next years' process reviews. Copy of draft monitoring plan shall be sent to FHWA for review and comments prior to submittal to the review committee. The review committee shall approve the schedule for the next year based on their evaluation of all process reviews completed within the last year, and DLAE and OLP staff recommendations.

## FORMAL PROCESS REVIEWS

The PRE shall select team members for each topic based on recommendations from the committee and who would be appropriate to review the topic selected. Agencies to be reviewed will be based on recommendation from DLAEs and OLP Area Engineers.

PRE is accountable for developing the format for the review plan (i.e., objectives, scope, and approach), incorporating other team members' recommendations into the plan and preparing the process review report.

Reviews of a local agency's files and processes can take one hour or it can take all day. It can involve the review of one project, several project or a general review of the local agency's files. Each approved review will be different based on the topic to be reviewed. Local agencies will be notified in advance of the topic of the review and the estimated time required for the review.

The DLAEs shall schedule review team meetings with selected local agencies in their district.

## MINI PROCESS REVIEWS

In addition to the topics outlined in the monitoring plan, projects will be evaluated by mini-process reviews on a less formal basis such as random sampling or spot checking of project scope documentation, PS&E packages etc. The difference between a mini process review and regular process reviews is that the mini process reviews are usually conducted over one or several projects and can be conducted by either OLP, DLAE or other Caltrans' personnel involved with local assistance projects.

Another form of a mini process review will be through the distribution of questionnaires to evaluate specific procedures used for Federal-aid project activities. Responses from the questionnaire will be used as one criteria for determining if any agencies will be reviewed through the more formal process review method approved by the Process Review Committee.

Results from the mini process reviews will be reported to the Process Review Committee and FHWA in the same manner as regular process reviews.

## REVIEW PLAN

Prior to commencing a process review on a particular topic, the review team shall develop a review plan. This plan shall state the objectives and scope of activities to be studied. A checklist and series of questions shall be developed before agencies are scheduled to be reviewed. Copies of each review plan shall be forwarded to FHWA for information.

## 19.3 FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The main objective of the process review report shall be to provide Caltrans and FHWA management documented information and recommendations regarding the local assistance Federal-aid and State funded programs.

Other objectives include:

- Assurance that resultant product are of an acceptable quality
- Identify weakness, deficient processes or procedure requiring improvement
- Provide specific recommendations to correct deficiencies or improve processes
- Documentation of existing deficiencies for future comparison
- Evaluation of benefits derived from previous recommendations
- Identify innovative method adopted as a result of new delegation for possible publication and distribution
- Follow through to implementation

## FINAL REPORT

Upon completion of the local agencies reviews, a review report shall be prepared by the PRE (with input from the team members) and submitted to the Process Review Committee for approval. Findings and recommendations shall be made by the Caltrans' process review team and forwarded to the Process Review Committee in the process review report. The Process Review Committee shall review the report and

either reject it with comments for corrections, or approve the report and recommendations. If sanctions are recommended they shall be applied immediately, see Chapter 20 "Deficiencies and Sanctions." Once the committee has approved the report it is considered final. Copies of all final reports shall be forwarded to FHWA for information. The final report shall include as a minimum:

- Objectives, scope, and approach used
- Findings - noting significant differences between intended and actual processes, and citing both strong and weak points in process and procedures
- Recommendations for each and every finding, and identify specific items or actions to correct or minimize deficiencies
- Action taken/Follow-up

Based on the reviews, assurances can be established that engineered processes and procedures are being implemented as intended, and local agencies are producing the desired product

Synopsis of each report, approved by the Process Review Committee, will also be posted on the Internet at OLP Home Page at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov>.

The synopsis of the report will contain the minimum information, from above, but will not contain the names of the individual local agencies.

## **CORRECTIONS**

Based on the findings and recommendations of the review, local assistance procedure may need to be improved. Minor improvements will be handled with the Local Programs Procedures (LPP) and manual change procedures. Major improvements will be reviewed by a quality improvement team for recommended improvements.

All project deficiencies shall be brought to the attention of the local agency during the review. The local agency will be expected to take appropriate action immediately to correct the deficiencies.

## **19.4 SUMMARY**

Local agencies shall make all project documentation and backup records available at any time for inspection by Caltrans and FHWA reviewing personnel. Use of a uniform project record-keeping system, together with diligent maintenance of the system, greatly facilitates a process review and minimizes negative findings. Good records of all project related activities clearly demonstrate to all concerned that project supervision and control were attained on the project.

## **19.5 REFERENCES**

23 CFR 640.115  
Caltrans/FHWA Stewardship Agreement